Guide to

Distributing Prescription Medication

at Elementary School

RÉGIE RÉGIONALE
DE LA SANTÉ ET DES
SERVICES SOCIAUX
DE MONTRÉAL-CENTRE

July 2002

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We wish to thank the many people who participated and collaborated in writing the *Guide to Distributing Prescription Medication at Elementary School.*

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Foreword

In 1999, the Comité Régional des Services en Milieu Scolaire was asked to examine the issue of distributing prescription medication and providing treatment follow-up at school. The fact that a growing number of students must take medication during school hours, while in the care of school staff, is a source of concern. School staff distribute medication at school because they want to contribute to their students' well being. This Guide, produced at the request of the school and health networks, provides support to families by proposing guidelines aimed at facilitating the work of concerned school staff.

To shed light on the situation, the Comité Régional set up a working group to:

- Describe the state of affairs and elucidate the issue;
- Identify the respective responsibilities of the school, of parents and of the health and social services network (from the legal and operational point of view);
- Propose a procedural guide for distributing medication and providing treatment follow-up.

The working group began its work in November 2000. In October 2001, it provided a first version of the present document to school boards and CLSCs for comment. During that period, the working group had to put its work on hold to deal with operation "meningo", which was led by the CLSCs and targeted all Montreal area schools. Finally, a second version was submitted to the Comité Régional in June 2002 for approval. The Guide to Distributing Prescription Medication at Elementary School was then made available to school and CLSC staff.

The same working group will examine treatment follow-up as a separate issue.

*The present Guide can be used at other school levels, as needed. Its use is not limited to elementary school.

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GUIDE TO DISTRIBUTING MEDICATION AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL[1]

Introduction

The present Guide deals with medication prescribed by authorized persons.[2] It is **mandatory** for the "Authorization to Distribute Medication" form (Appendix C) to be filled out by the parent or legal guardian before any medication is distributed at school.

This Guide does not cover the medication used to counter anaphylactic reaction. If appropriate, please refer to the **Guide d'intervention pour les élèves à risque de réaction anaphylactique en milieu scolaire (Intervention Guide for Students at Risk of Anaphylactic Reaction),** produced by the Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal-Centre in August 1999.

1. Some definitions

1.1 "Medication": any substance or mixture of substances which may be used:

I. for the diagnosis, treatment, remission or prevention of any disease, ailment, any abnormal physical or mental condition, or their symptoms in man or animal, or

II. to restore, rectify or change organic functions in man or animal.[3]

1.2 An adverse effect: "A harmful reaction that is contrary to the desired effect, that occurs when medication is used in normal or experimental doses for the diagnosis, treatment or prevention of a disease, or to modify an organic function."[4]

1.3 Distribute: Give, hand out (Nelson Canadian Dictionary). Distributing medication is among educators' tasks. (See *Legal references,* Appendix D)

1.4 Administer: Apply as a remedy (Nelson Canadian Dictionary). Administering medication is an act reserved to doctors or nurses, and the child's immediate family. (See *Legal references,* Appendix D)

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[1] We wish to highlight the contribution of the Commission scolaire de Montréal, which generously allowed us use its document "Les premiers soins dans les écoles/Distribution de médicaments prescrits" (First Aid in Schools/Distributing Prescription Medication), June 2000, as a basis for our discussion.

[2] As of June 2001, the persons authorized to prescribe medication were: doctors, dentists, optometrists and podiatrists.

[3] Éditeur officiel du Québec, Loi sur la pharmacie (Pharmacy Act), R.S.Q., Chapter P-10, Updated September 26, 2000, Section 1, p. 1

[4] Canadian Pharmacists Association, Compendium of Pharmaceuticals and Specialties (CPS), 36th edition, Toronto, 2001, P. A-11

2 Shared responsibilities

Parents are the foremost persons responsible for their children's education and health. Whenever possible, medication must be given by parents at home. Distributing medication at school is always an exceptional measure.

2.1 Parents' and legal guardians' responsibilities

1) Be familiar with the school's procedure for distributing medication to elementary-school children.

2) Ask the person authorized to prescribe the medication to prescribe, as far as possible, long acting medication in order to decrease and even **eliminate the need to distribute medication at school.**

3) Inform the school and comply with **mandatory** signing of the "Authorization to Distribute Medication" form (Appendix C), at the beginning of the school year or during the year, as appropriate, so that the prescription medication prescribed by an authorized person can be distributed to their child.

4) Make sure to provide the prescription medication in the container received from the pharmacist, with the label produced by the pharmacy.

5) In the event that medication **must be taken on a regular basis**, ask the pharmacist to prepare the medication in **pillbox format**[5], and inform him or her that the child may be taking the medication at school.

6) Inform the school in writing, by filling out the "Authorization to Distribute Medication" form, of any change in distribution of the medication. They must also indicate significant adverse reactions linked to the medication prescribed for their child. This information can be obtained from the pharmacist.

7) See to it that the prescription is refilled as needed, by completing the "Authorization to Distribute Medication" form, and take the medication home when it no longer needs to be taken at school.

[5] Examples: Dispill, Secur-dose and Dosett

2.2 Proposals directed at school management:

1) Write, in the school's principles, and highlight at information meetings that "distributing medication in school" is **an exceptional measure** and that parents and legal guardians are generally invited to administer medication to their child **at home**.

2) Inform and disseminate information on the procedure for distributing prescription medication prescribed by an authorized person (sample letter, Appendix B) **to parents or legal guardians, and to school staff.**

3) Specify to parents or legal guardians that elementary-school children who must **exceptionally** take medication at school, must do so under the supervision of a member of the school's staff.

4) Ask parents or legal guardians to request that the medication prescribed for their children be long acting, rather than administered at the usual 8-hour intervals (Appendix B). Strongly recommend that parents use a **pillbox** when medication must be taken **on a regular basis**.

5) Keep medication and the required forms in a single, central and safe place.

6) Appoint the person(s) responsible for distributing medication at the school and, confidentiality reasons, ensure that only those persons have access to information regarding medication distribution.

7) Make the "Authorization to Distribute Medication" form (Appendix C) **available** at school, through the staff involved (secretary, childcare service, nurse, etc.), and **accessible** for verification purposes. Make sure that the form is properly filled out by the child's parents or legal guardians before distributing medication.

8) Provide the school nurse with a list of students taking medication.

9) Return the medication to parents at the end of the school year or distribution period, if applicable.

10) Ensure the application of this Guide during outings.

2.3 Proposals directed at concerned school staff:

1) Be familiar with the school's procedure for distributing medication.

2) Have the "Authorization to Distribute Medication" form duly filled out and signed by the parent or legal guardian.
However, a temporary written authorization (e.g. a note in the agenda) can be accepted while the form is being filled out.

3) Make sure that all medication to be distributed is presented in the container received from the pharmacist, and features a pharmacy label.

4) Make sure that the medication is stored in recommended conditions (refrigerated, etc.) and kept in a safe place.

5) Fill out the recommended form "Prescription Medication Distribution Record".

6) Make sure that the medication is taken in the presence of the staff member distributing it.

7) See to the application of this **Guide** during outings.

2.4 Responsibilities of the school nurse

1) Participate in implementing the **Guide for Distributing Medication at School** in each school.

2) Meet with school staff on a yearly basis and as needed, to inform them on how to distribute medication, and on the best place to store medication.

3) Present the **Guide for Distributing Medication at School** during public information sessions for parents or legal guardians, alongside school management.

4) Keep the names of all of the medication the child takes on a regular basis in the child's file, with all relevant documents.

5) Act as a resource person for school management and staff as needed.

6) Conduct follow-up with parents or guardians when necessary.

3. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A-1

SAMPLE

PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION DISTRIBUTION RECORD[6]

CHILD'S NAME: _____

NAME OF THE MEDICATION: _____

FROM: _____ TO: _____ Year: _____

DOSE INDICATED	DOSE GIVEN	DATE	TIME	SIGNATURE

[6] Document recommended for the child's file

SAMPLE

PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION DISTRIBUTION RECORD [7]

DATE	TIME	CHILD'S NAME	NAME OF THE MEDICATION	DOSE INDICATED	DOSE GIVEN	SIGNATURE OF THE PERSON WHO DISTRIBUTED THE MEDICATION

[7] Document recommended for the person distributing the medication

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE DOCUMENT TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO PARENTS OR LEGAL GUARDIANS

NOTE

To: Parents or legal guardians
From: School principal
Date:

Regarding: The distribution of **prescription medication**

Dear Madam, Sir,

The present letter is to inform you that the school's staff can, **exceptionally**, distribute medication prescribed for your child.

If your elementary-school child must take medication while at school, it is **mandatory** for you to fill out and sign the "Authorization to Distribute Prescription Medication" form. The form and the medication must be given to the school secretary or the person appointed to receive them.

It is also mandatory for the medication to be in a container received from the pharmacy, with the label produced by the pharmacy. You are in charge of making sure that the prescription is **refilled** as needed.

We would like to remind you that *distributing medication at school* is nevertheless **an exceptional measure.** To avoid the use of this exceptional measure, we ask you, whenever possible, to request 12-hour or 24-hour doses of your child's prescription medication. That way, the medication can be given at home, eliminating any risks involved in transporting medication, such as leaving it behind. If this is impossible, please have the medication prescribed to cover 8-hour intervals.

Thank-you for your cooperation.

The school principal

Attached: "Authorization to Distribute Medication" form

APPENDIX C

AUTHORIZATION TO DISTRIBUTE MEDICATION

School staff will not be able to distribute **prescription** medication to students unless parents or legal guardians have filled out and signed the present form.

Let us specify that the distribution of medication in no way entails the obligation on the part of the staff to make a diagnosis, record observations or write a report.

The information written by the pharmacist on the **label** identifying the medication is proof of the authorization provided by those prescribing the medication. It is therefore important to always provide the medication in the original container bearing the child's name.

The label must show the child's name, the doctor's name, the name of the medication, its expiry date, the dosage and the duration of treatment.

If your child needs an EPIPEN, please fill out the appropriate form, available at the school.

AUTHORIZATION TO DISTRIBUTE MEDICATION (PLEASE write in block letters)

I authorize a member of the school's staff to distribute the following medication to my child according to the indicated dosage:

Child's last name: _____ First name: _____ Class: _____

From: _____ to: _____ Year: _____

Name of the medication: _____

Dosage (dose and intervals): _____
(See pharmacist's label, as needed)

Time at which the medication must be taken (e.g.: with meals, hour of day), if the medication must be taken as needed (upon the appearance of symptoms), specify when to give it:
_____ _____ _____

Means of distribution: Inhalation (pump): _____ Oral: _____ Cutaneous: _____

Does the medication have to be refrigerated?: Yes: _____ No: _____

Foreseeable serious adverse reactions: _____

_____

Signature of the parent or legal guardian: _____

Telephone number of the parent or legal guardian: _____

Telephone number in case of an emergency: _____

Relationship with the child: _____ Date : _____

Inform the school whenever the prescription is changed or refilled.

APPENDIX D

LEGAL, LEGISLATIVE AND OTHER REFERENCES

- Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (R.S.Q., c.C-12), s. 2 :

  "Every human being whose life is in peril has a right to assistance. Every person must come to the aid of anyone whose life is in peril, either personally or calling for aid, by giving him the necessary and immediate physical assistance, unless it involves danger to himself or a third person, or he has another valid reason."

- Government of Quebec. **Civil Code of Quebec** 1998-1999: Regulations Respecting the Civil Code of Quebec and Related Legislation, 6th edition, 1670 pages, s. 1471:

  "Where a person comes to the assistance of another person or, for an unselfish motive, disposes, free of charge, of property for the benefit of another person, he is exempt from all liability for injury that may result from it, unless the injury is due to his intentional or gross fault."

- Conseil scolaire de l'Île de Montréal (Island of Montreal School Board)
  Carnet juridique (Legal Memo), January-February, 1996, p.17
  Yves Carrières, Esq.- Chief Counsel

  "[...] It seems to me to be of the utmost importance that educators in schools only administer medication to students under the specific, written instructions of the child's parents or legal guardians. Similarly, the administration of said medication must not involve any obligation on the part of the teacher to give a diagnosis or write his or her observations or a report."

- **Carnet juridique (Legal Memo),** Fall 2000, p. 8
  Ibid.

  "[...] The Court of Appeal decided that it was necessary to distinguish between the "administration" and the "distribution" of medication, and that "distribution" was among educators' tasks, whereas "administration" was an act reserved to doctors or nurses, as well as the child's immediate family."

- Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal-Centre. **Programme cadre-type de services de santé et de services sociaux en milieu scolaire** (préscolaire, primaire, secondaire) (Sample Framework Program of Health and Social Services in Schools - preschool, elementary school and secondary school), June 1998.